

# Castlemaine Naturalist

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## 15 Minutes of Pure Delight

Tuesday July 16 at Yapeen was a remarkable morning. We had had 3mm of rain overnight, but the temperature had dropped to  $-1^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Consequently there was a film of ice over the grass in the paddocks, small icicles were hanging from trees and shrubs, and the sun was highlighting frozen spiders' webs. At 8.15am in beautiful sunshine suddenly dozens of bird calls erupted. While I sat on the back porch enjoying a cup of tea (needless to say, wearing two sweaters, and anorak, beanie and mittens) these are the birds I saw within the space of 15 minutes - a flowering Cootamundra wattle was the attraction for all the smaller birds. What an unbelievable few minutes this was!

Magpie	Yellow-rumped,
Magpie Lark	Yellow and
Australian Raven	Brown Thornbills
Kookaburra	Grey Shrike-thrush
Grey Currawong	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Pied Currawong	Grey Fantail
Galah	Brown Flycatcher (Jacky Winter)
Long-billed Corella	Scarlet Robin
Red Wattlebird	Silvereye
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	imm. Eastern Spinebill
Crimson Rosella	imm. Golden Whistler
Eastern Rosella	Striated Pardalote
White-winged Choughs (h)	Spotted Pardalote
Masked Lapwing (h)	Restless Flycatcher

The few Silvereyes were the first seen for two months.

Margaret Badminton

## Tawny-crowned Honeyeater at Sandon

3.15 pm, 19/7/96, Map 7723, 373819, alt. 275m. Overcast dull day, threatening more rain. Along our track at Sandon on the edge of the road reserve near an open clump of 3m re-growth grey box and near

a good stand of mature flowering yellow gums, with a fairly open paddock behind, I had a good side view with binoculars at 3.5m for about 30 seconds while the bird sat on the top wire of the fence. I didn't wait around to study it further as I was a fair way from home and it was about to pour!

Susanna Starr.

### **Sandon Bird List for June**

Australian Shelduck	Yellow-faced,
Brown Falcon	Singing (10/6),
Masked Lapwing	White-eared,
Galah	Yellow-tufted,
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Fuscous and
Crimson Rosella	White-naped Honeyeaters
White-throated Treecreeper	Eastern Spinebill (10/6)
Wren	Scarlet robin
Spotted Pardalote	Grey Shrike-thrush
Striated Pardalote	Australian Magpie-lark
Weebill	Grey Fantail
Brown,	Willie Wagtail
Buff-rumped,	Australian Magpie
Yellow-rumped,	White-winged Chough
Yellow and	Diamond Firetail
Striated Thornbills	Silvereye.
Red Wattlebird	

Susanna Starr

#### **From the Past -**

I have been again looking through the Booklet "Honey Flora of Victoria" published by the Department of Agriculture in 1922. I have seen bees working enthusiastically in the flowers of the Black Boy, so I was quite surprised at the information in this article, which I hope you will find as interesting as I did.

#### **'Southern Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*)**

'This is the Common Grass Tree known by several local names such as Black Boys or Kangaroo Tails. It has a trunk like a fern tree, but with long narrow, drooping blades or leaves. The usually solitary flower spike, which is sometimes up to 3 feet long, is carried on a stout upright stalk. Grass Trees furnish a resin soluble in alcohol, containing the base of picric acid. This resin, which exists in this species in considerable quantities, is very inflammable, and grass trees therefore burn fiercely, are however seldom killed by fire, and flower generally speaking, only after being burnt the previous season.

'Bees gather the resin eagerly and use it as a propolis for filling

cracks and the spaces between the ends of the top bars of the frames and the hive wall. During cool weather this resin sets so hard and cementlike that the frames become almost unworkable, while, during warm temperatures, it adheres to everything coming in contact with it. Being soluble in alcohol it is however easily removed from the hands by methylated spirits or petrol.

'The flower of the grass tree furnishes pollen to bees, and profusely secretes a very watery nectar, often neglected by bees, which when gathered produces a rank unpalatable honey. Except in seasons when no other nectar-yielding blossoms are available, grass-tree country should be avoided in locating apiaries on account of the trouble of the glueing together of everything in the hive and of the poor quality of the honey'

Contributed Rita Mills



Fig. 69.—Grass Tree.

### Observations

- \* Brolgas, two pair, in two different locations, between Moloort and Campbelltown. L.R.
- \* Restless Flycatcher and Grey Fantail in Harcourt. B.E.
- \* Koala seen at Ridells Creek. J. & J.L.
- \* At Hattah; Pied Butcherbirds, Noisy Miners, and Blue-faced Honeyeaters, all on and near the picnic table, waiting to be fed. E.P.
- \* A Crested Bellbird in Newcome Street (Little Bendigo). N.W.
- \* At Little Hampton; several large flocks of ravens, also Straw-necked Ibis. On the Thursday Birdwatch on the steep hill just through the Oak Forest at Harcourt, a Golden Whistler and Yellow Robin were seen, and also several small holes in the ground - dug by what? Echidnas and Choughs were ruled out. S.B.
- \* Several Basket Fungi found in a garden at Norwood Hill. It was also



noted that the wattles have masses of buds this year. J.L.

\* There are masses of lerps on the Red Gums near Heathcote this year. E.P. Harcourt, too. S.B. E.P. noted that pardelotes, which are predators of lerps, seem to be way down in numbers after last year's drought.

\* A flock of about 50 thornbills was seen at Barkers Creek. A.van G.

\* First flowers on the Cootamundras in our own bush at North Castlemaine appeared on June 29. One small Golden Wattle in flower in the Wareek bush the other side of Maryborough on Sunday June 30. R.M.

\* Mum Magpie at North Castlemaine collecting sticks on July 16 and roots and other softer bits the day after. Also over the past few weeks ravens have been carrying beakfulls of food on several occasions. First flowers of the Yellow Gum found when bunches of twigs have been dropped under the tree - I suspect by our resident Galahs- on July 2. R.M.

\* Forktailed Kites at Harcourt Cemetary. E.P. and at Big Hill. R.M.

\* Ploughshare and Golden Wattles are fully out, (towards end of July). E.P.

\* Magpies carrying sticks at Norwood Hill, too. J.H.

\* A great skein of Ibis, perhaps 1000 birds, were seen flying over the little swampy area on the plateau just out of Taradale against the sunset sky on 23/7. R.M.

\* After some Crimson Rosellas had been flying around in the garden in Campbell St. a lone yellow bird was seen perched in one of the trees. It was the size and shape generally of the rosellas - perhaps one lacking some of the normal pigment? Binoculars, of course! were inside the house. K.T.

\* Singing Honeyeater in a flock of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters at Sandon on 10/6. This is a new addition to the bird list. S.S.

## Yellow Thornbills

Following on from Ern Perkin's presentation on thornbills at the June meeting, I have found a reliable diagnostic feature of the Yellow Thornbill (the least common of all the usual thornbills at Sandon) to be the pinkish throat. Although not mentioned in Simpson and Days' Field Guide, it is clearly visible in the drawing. Yellow Thornbills may be often overlooked as they tend to be single birds in a mixed flock of other thornbills. I have only once seen four together.

Also - In response to the note about a Scrub Wren tapping at its reflection in the window, we solved the problem a few years ago by temporarily tacking up an old terylene curtain (op.shop) on the outside of the window. Our Scarlet Robin had been so persistent that we feared it would run out of time and energy to raise a family.

Susanna Starr

## Welcome -

The club welcomes new members Dee and Peter Sanson ; and Murray Winter (Daylesford) in June, and Jon and June Levers, July.

**Apology** - The date of Bob Webbs' death in last month's C.N. was incorrect due to a typing error. It should have read "Sunday 30".

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From "Nature News" published by the Trust for Nature (Victoria) Issue #4 July '96

"Australia is in the enviable position of being the only developed nation on earth with a high biodiversity" - Prof. David Bellamy

"Australia's biodiversity is a significant national asset and recognised internationally as being of global significance. Its flora and fauna has been described as 'megadiverse', a term used to describe ecosystems of exeptional variety."

From the same source -

"A recent report published by the Western Australian Environment Protection Authority has shed a little more light on the effect of herbicides, particularly glyphosate, on our frog populations. This study investigated the toxicity of glyphosate with native frogs in W.A. It was found that the formulated herbicide (Roundup) was more toxic to frogs than glyphosate alone.

"Tadpoles were significantly more sensitive to Roundup than 360 juveniles or adults. Formulations which include glyphosate and surfactant are commonly used to control emergent weeds. The recommended application rates may pose a risk to tadpoles in shallow wetlands (less than 5cm in depth).

"Source. Environment Protection Authority (Western Australia), 1995, *Acute toxicity of a herbicide to selected frog species; final report*. EPA Technical series #79, Perth."

From "Sun-nat" , Newsletter of the Sunraysia Field Naturalists' Club Inc., Mildura.

"At our June General Meeting we were informed and entertained by David Gee whose subject of 'Bats' was dealt with by both slides and the real life thing - in the form of two bats. One was a very small Grey-headed bat which clung to David's jumper, and the other, a fruit bat, which, when released from its cage, moved around the room with great curiosity, flying from shoulder to shoulder..."

# V.F.N.C.A Campout Programme

## Myaring Reserve

### Fri Oct 18 – Sun Oct 20

Fri 18	Casterton Field Nats members welcome campers at the reserve. Registration from 6 – 9pm
Sat 19	10 am– Split into two groups. Group 1. Bird observation; leader Ian McCallum. Group 2. Orchid observation ; leader Lloyd Baulch.  Lunch 12.30 to 1.30pm  Afternoon – groups swap excursions.
Bluff	6.30pm – VFN meeting, followed by evening meal at Bluff. Guest Speaker.
Sun 20	10 am – Fossil hunt at limestone cliffs.  12.30pm – Barbecue lunch at the reserve. Breakup after lunch.  Casterton Field Nats farewell campers.

Cost per head – \$30. RSVP by Oct 10th with payment please, to Casterton Field Naturalists Club.

Carol McKinnon, Sec.,

RMB 1108 Casterton 3311.

Ph 055 811957

Myaring reserve is between the Gleneng River and the Casterton-Dartmoor road. The turn-off is at Piericle, but there will be signs to the Camp. The camp-site is primitive with no showers, basic toilets, no power etc, and a rainwater tank.

There is motel and motel/hotel accommodation at Dartmoor and Casterton, which are all clean and comfortable according to Casterton FNC Sec.

### From The Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association

**Howman's Gap Camp March 7-10 1997.** The VFNCA will be holding the usual Long-weekend camp at Howman's Gap in 1997. The camp will be available for an extra day, on the Friday, if there is sufficient demand. Therefore it is essential that those members who wish to have an extra day contact Dick Southcombe. Members who wish the extra day could arrive at the camp from 4 pm on the Thursday.

**Fraser Island Safari.** A ten day safari is a possibility during August 1997, with John Sinclair of Go Bush Safaris. John, who led the *Save Fraser Island* campaign is most



hospitable, a good communicator, and obviously knows the island well. Field naturalists interested in joining the safari are asked to advise Dick Southcombe.

**Field Studies Workshop at Lady Northcote Camp, Bacchus Marsh.** The camp has been tentatively booked from 29 September to 5 October 1997. This is the last week of the school holidays as was discussed at Mt Martha. As we have to confirm this booking with a substantial deposit in the coming months, we need the basic information to proceed, i.e. How many participants? What topics do they prefer? Who will assist and in what way?

*Ern Perkins has booking sheets, and further information about the above.*

## Hungry Enzymes Thrive on Toxic Slime

(Adapted from an article in VFFA Dec.'95, taken from an article by Ian Anderson, courtesy of New Scientist)

Toxic blue-green algae may have met their match in a bacterium which destroys their poison. Microbiologists in Australia have found a group of enzymes in the bacterium that will break down the toxin from *Microcystus*, a common blue-green alga. They plan to grow the bacterium in bulk, freeze-dry it and release it into waterways and treatment plants.

'Blue-green algae are not really algae at all, but bacteria that obtain their energy from sunlight, through photosynthesis. Because of their colour they are also known as cyanobacteria. In summer a combination of warmth, calm water and a build up of nutrients can trigger blooms of cyanobacteria. Any toxins they produce appear in large amounts in the water, and can cause fatal liver disease in livestock. The toxins produced by *Microcystus* have also been blamed for the exceptionally high rates of liver cancer in people in China.

'A student, David Bourne, found the toxin beating bacterium in river water in 1993. It makes three enzymes that break down the most powerful toxin in *Microcystus*.

'Cyanobacteria contain tiny gas-filled pockets or vesicles which allow them to float and form a thick slime that looks like green paint. Many types produce toxins, but *Microcystus* has come under particular scrutiny because of the evidence that it harms humans.'

'Traditional methods for controlling outbreaks of toxic cyanobacteria have several drawbacks. Usually the microbes are poisoned with copper sulphate, but this leaves the toxins unaffected.'

Contributed

## CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street.

Fri Aug 9. **Turkey and its Wildflowers.** Speaker is Hillary Weatherhead. 8pm, Cont. Ed.

Sat Aug 10 **Walk along the Great Dividing Trail** between Spring Gully and Fryerstown. Leader M. Willis. Leave CHIRP at 1.30pm sharp.

\* Note – **Bookings** for the trip to Alan Reid's Property close on Sept 13. For details of the weekend see Chris. Morris at the meeting.

Thurs Aug 15 **Thursday Birdwatching** – Note that this is back to the 3rd Thursday. Meet, 9.30am at Cont Ed.

→ Wed Sept 11 **Working Bee** pulling Cape Broom. Meet 9am, cr. Mary St and Froomes Road. Bring thick gloves.

Fri Sept 13. **Grey Crowned Babblers and Swift Parrots**, their future in our woodlands. Chris Tzaro, speaker. 8 pm, Cont. Ed.

Sat Sept 14 **Lockwood Forest.** Leader E. Perkins. Leave CHIRP 1.30 pm sharp.

Fri Oct 11 **Raising Box/Ironbark Awareness.** Charlie Sherwin, Vic. Nat Parks Ass'n. 8.00pm Cont. Ed.

Sat, Sun Oct 12 & 13 **Alan Reid's property**, Burns Road. See note above.

Sat Nov 2 **Festival Walk, Kalimna.** 10am. See Festival brochure for details.

Fri Nov 8 **Catchment and Land Protection Strategies** for our Region. Shawn Butters, speaker.

Sat Nov 9 **Dead Horse Gully Walk.** 1.30pm. See Festival Brochure for details.

Sat Dec. 14. **Discovery walk** from Shire boundary to Baringhup along Carisbrook/Baringhup road, (approx. 5–6km). Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10 am. Take lunch, drinks, etc., and shady hat, boots, thick pants, gaiters or such. Leader E. Perkins.

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**Committee:** C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis ( Interim Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge.

### Meetings:-

**General** – Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Continuing Education, Templeton St. at 8 pm.

**Business** – Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

### **Subscriptions – 1996**

Ordinary Membership: single \$14 Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10 Family \$16.

Supporting \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.